

## Humberto Mercader – Be Proactive with Your Federal Partners

My first advice to any economic development leader that's new to this role is: Be proactive. Reach out to as many people as you can in the federal government, understanding which agencies, which programs are relevant to you. Now you may think it's just EDA, the Economic Development Administration, or you may think it's just Commerce, but you would be surprised. There's a lot of other agencies that are very, very relevant to economic development.

You know, just to give an example, the DOL, the Department of Labor is super relevant to us, especially on the workforce side. I would add Department of Defense (DOD), National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health (NIH), all of those are agencies that are directly related to funding opportunities and programs that are available for states to push forward an economic development agenda.

So, with that said, you know, be strategic. Identify the key persons that you believe can be helpful. Do an in-person visit to DC, visit the agencies. Our experience was really good. They opened doors to us.

Leverage the governor's relationship with the federal government. Usually, governors have relationships either in Congress or certain agencies. That was our case. Our governor used to be a resident commissioner, so a Congressman. So, he had longstanding relationships and that was very helpful for us in the sense that it opened doors. And some of the initiatives that you can come up with in collaboration with the federal government are funding, but a lot of others are not necessarily funding. Sometimes it's technical assistance, it's understanding best practices, or understanding what the best way of doing things is.

So again, my advice is to be proactive, be strategic and don't think it's just Commerce or EDA. Think outside your smaller economic development scope. Think broader about what other agencies may be relevant to you.